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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000905

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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI MAPS OUT EDUCATION REFORM

1. (U) Djibouti's Minister of Education, Abdi Ibrahim Absieh, and Minister of Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mahmoud Ali Youssef, recently assembled donor country representatives in Djibouti, as well as concerned UN offices, to outline Djibouti's education policy and steps toward education reform. Both Ministers stated that human resources development through education and training is the primary strategic path towards reducing the country's poverty.

2. (U) Absieh told the donors and representatives that thanks to his Ministry's efforts and the support of technical and financial partners, Djibouti had managed to improve access to primary education by increasing the number of classrooms from 570 in 2000 to 748 in 2003. In addition, the numbers of primary school teachers increased sufficiently to meet the demands posed by an increase in the number of students. The average rate of primary education schooling, he said, went from 39 percent to 52 percent during the same period. In addition, students and teachers in basic education increased respectively by 25 percent and 12 percent during this period. Since the creation in Djibouti in 2000 of POLE University, the numbers of students in higher education increased due to an increase in the number of graduates from secondary schools. He said POLE had made advances in improving education quality, program review, scheduling and teaching through a competency-based approach. On a general level, regularization of teachers' salaries had improved the level of motivation of teachers and contributed to a reduction in absenteeism.

3. (U) Absieh spoke about the institutional capacities of his Ministry to manage education reform. He said these capacities had been reinforced with the creation of a new organizational chart that is much more functional and the donation of a new building to the Ministry where all administration and teaching services are now based. In addition, Education's share of the nation's budget has been in continuous growth for the past four years.

4. (U) Absieh outlined the following objectives Djibouti's education sector hoped to achieve as a result of reform:

- work on improving girls' education and education of children from underprivileged backgrounds and reducing the dropout rate;
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- set up a public pre-school which can be used as an example for development of private pre-schools;
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- increase available classrooms to help meet universal primary schooling of children from six to sixteen years;
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- finalize reform of technical and vocational education by establishing Learning Centers in professional fields compatible with each region's economy;
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- encourage private initiative in private education by adopting new legislation on modalities of creating and operating private schools;
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- provide student access to all textbooks and teachers' guides compatible with new instructional approaches at all levels in basic education;
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- consolidate program assessment and learning capacities of the Center for Research, Information and Production of National Education (CRIPEN) and accelerate introduction of radio, TV and new information and telecommunications technologies in teaching techniques.

5. (U) Absieh added that to be able to run an education system that has drastically changed, new and modern management tools and training sessions are needed to improve organizational and planning capacities at all levels of administration. He said decentralized structures will be created and careful study will be given to equipment and infrastructure. Moreover, local communities and student-parent associations will be encouraged to participate in the management and maintenance of schools. In non-formal education, public partners as well as NGOs will be involved in the development of a strategy for adult literacy programs.

16. (U) The World Bank's representative, Ousmane Diagane, commended the Minister of Education for the efforts his department was making and encouraged similar meetings with donor partners on a regular basis. He said such a meeting will enable donors to exchange information and coordinate their actions to support millennium challenge objectives, especially to achieve gender parity in education. He also praised the quality of education in Djibouti, especially the availability of textbooks that is bringing the ratio from one textbook per four students down to a ratio of one textbook for each student. However, he underlined that the number of school children should be increased and the recruitment of women in the teaching profession should be encouraged in order to further promote girls' education. He reminded the donor community of its commitment in Dakar to provide resources to each country at a level that will demonstrate a political will to extend education to all. He said the World Bank has initiated a loan program to implement rapidly the "Education for All" program for countries with limited financial resources.

17. (U) Based on a proposal put forward by France's Development Director, France was unanimously chosen as coordinator of the donor community in the field of education in Djibouti. Its role will consist of coordinating the intervention of financial and technical partners and disseminating information as well as facilitating accelerated implementation of the "Education for All" program.

18. (U) Comment: Through a grant of USD 12 million, USAID is assisting the Ministry of Education to implement the education reform program throughout the nation. USAID support to Djibouti's basic education program (Grades 1-12) has four major elements: increased access to basic education through school construction and rehabilitation; improved quality of teaching and learning; increased opportunities for girls' education; and promotion of strategies and training to provide sustainable employment to school graduates, particularly girls. Strategies to achieve these objectives rely on the provision of new information and communication technology services as well as traditional means to improve education, using both formal and non-formal education approaches to reach out to diverse and needy groups.

19. (U) Other donors supporting education reform include France, which provides teachers for secondary schools, Saudi Arabia, which supports Koranic schools in an amount approaching USD 10 million, the World Bank, which is providing USD 10 million in soft loans for reform (new school construction) and the African Development Fund, which is engaged in school rehabilitation. End comment.
RAGSDALE